

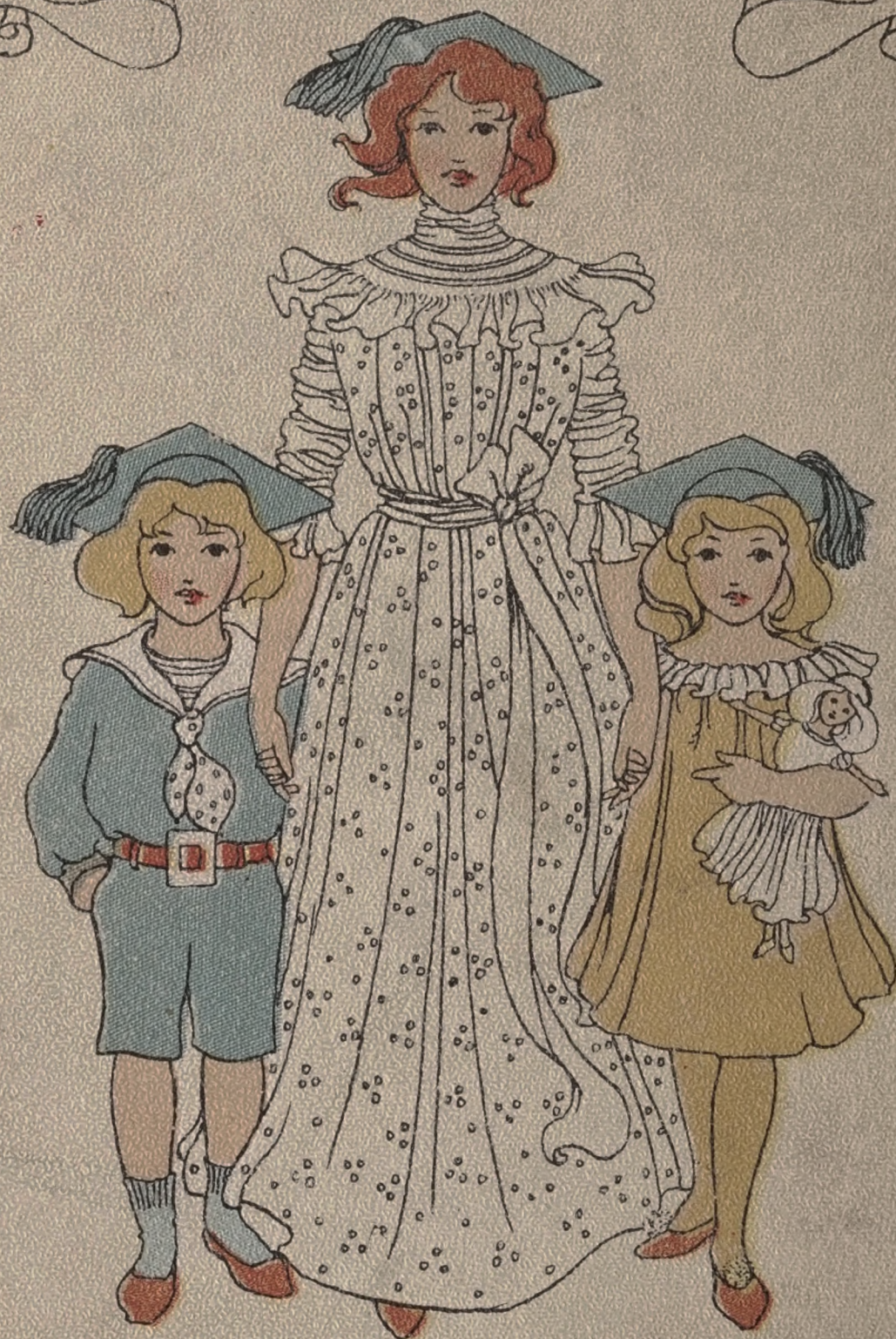
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MARY · F · LEONARD

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HALF A DOZEN THINKING CAPS.



"THEY DANCED AND SANG LIKE A LOT OF MERRY SAVAGES."



HALF A DOZEN THINKING CAPS



BY

MARY F. LEONARD



AUTHOR OF
"THE STORY OF
THE BIG FRONT
DOOR"



NEW YORK
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HALF A DOZEN THINKING CAPS.

CHAPTER FIRST.

HOW THE NEIGHBORHOOD FELT.

THEY made such a charming picture on the wide porch where they sat with their heads close together that Miss Mallory, who was walking up from the station with her bag in her hand, wished for her camera.

Not being certain of her way she approached the group and asked to be directed to Mrs. Brent's. Six pairs of eyes, counting those of an alert fox terrier, were immediately turned upon her, and a sweet-looking girl about ten years old, in a crisp white frock and blue ribbons, rose and replied in a dignified manner that Mrs. Brent lived on the next street.

"It's a red house; you can see the back of it from here," put in a boy who closely resembled Blue Ribbons and might have been a year older.

"And it has a rose vine on the porch," added a smiling little maid who sat in a big rocking chair.

"But so has Mrs. May's, Susan; why don't you let Mary Hyacinth tell her?" said a boy who wore glasses.

"It is the second house from the corner," the first speaker began, when a sailor boy with short yellow curls and the rosiest, merriest of faces stepped forward: "I'll show you the way," he said.

Miss Mallory was not one to decline an offer so cordially made, and no doubt she felt flattered to have an escort with U. S. N. on his cap, for she said, with a very pleasant smile: "Will you? I shall be so much obliged."

The eyes, ears and tail of the terrier asked as plainly as possible, "Do let me go, too," and at the words, "Come on, Pranks," he frisked down the steps with a bark of delight.

"Don't stay, Malcolm," Blue Ribbons called after them; "you know mother said you mustn't go to Mrs. Brent's."

"Perhaps then you'd better not go any farther than the corner," Miss Mallory suggested.

"She won't care if I don't go in. Mrs. Brent doesn't like me," Malcolm explained, looking up

at his companion with a face of such angelic sweetness she found the statement hard to believe.

"What can be the reason?" she asked.

"'Cause I tease Oscar. He's a cry-baby, and he's 'fraid of cows and lots of things—and he's older 'an me—an' he has long curls!"

Miss Mallory smiled a little as she asked: "How old are you?"

"I'm six, going on seven, and I'm going to sure-enough school next winter. No more kindergarten for me!"

Just here Pranks, who had been trotting sedately beside them, suddenly charged across the lawn and began to bark furiously at a stupid-looking pug who reposed peacefully on the doorstep of the house they were passing. An old gentleman, who sat there reading his paper, rapped violently with his cane and cried: "Call off your dog, sir! call off your dog, and don't come in here!"

Pranks, however, came scampering back without waiting to be called, with the air of having done something worthy of praise.

"He likes to scare old Snuffy," Malcolm said with a chuckle.

"I wonder if you aren't the little boy I used to

know three years ago? You lived in the city then and had long curls and wore white kilts, and they called you Bunny," said Miss Mallory.

"Why, yes, did you know me then? I was just a baby; I don't have long hair now, and next summer I'm going to have it cut with a machine, father says so. Why, when it's hot, Oscar has his pinned up like a lady!"

By this time they had turned the corner and Mrs. Brent, who was standing in her door, saw them and came hurrying to meet them.

"Prudence!" she exclaimed, greeting the young lady warmly, "you should have let us know what car you would take."

"I didn't know myself; and I had no trouble in finding my way, for Malcolm kindly offered to show me."

Mrs. Brent spoke to Malcolm and asked how his mother was, but Miss Mallory noticed her tone was cold.

"Thank you ever so much, dear," she said, taking the bag her guide had insisted upon carrying. "I hope you and I will become well acquainted one of these days. Tell your mother Cousin Prue is here and will come to see her to-morrow."

Malcolm wished just a little, as he and Pranks turned back, that he had not quarrelled with Oscar yesterday, for probably they would tell her all about it. He had taken a sudden liking to this tall bright-faced young lady, and when he looked over his shoulder and saw her with her arm around Oscar, he did not feel quite happy. "Cousin Prue," he repeated, "I wonder if she is my Cousin Prue?"

Meanwhile Mrs. Brent was showing her guest to her room.

"So you have made Malcolm's acquaintance?" she remarked.

"Yes; and what a dear little soul he is! but he says you don't like him," Miss Mallory replied.

"Well, seriously, Prudence, those McLean children are dreadful! I can't keep Oscar away from them, and they torment him nearly to death. I am beginning to wonder how we shall live through the summer, for, as perhaps you know, their father and mother are going abroad. It is bad enough when they are at home."

"You can't mean those charming children I saw on the porch. They didn't look as if they could be naughty!" exclaimed Miss Mallory.

"Yes, they do very well so far as looks go, but

just wait," and Mrs. Brent closed her lips tightly, as much as to say she could tell a great deal if she chose.

"Who was the tall, serious little girl who seemed to be spokesman? You know I have not seen the children for more than three years."

"It must have been Mary Hyacinth; she is the ring-leader in all the mischief, though Wyllis is a year older. Then probably the two Scotts were there, Arthur and Susan, the children of Mr. McLean's sister," Mrs. Brent replied, adding: "Just think, Prudence, of their throwing mud—it was Malcolm who did it, but the others put him up to it—on the Hollands' porch after it had been cleaned! Then when Thomas, the man, complained to Mr. McLean, Wyllis turned the hose on him; and I shall get Morris to tell you about last Fourth of July! When I was a child I wasn't so bad, I am sure," she concluded with a deep sigh.

Miss Mallory soon found that these naughty children furnished a topic of conversation as unfailling as the weather to the neighborhood of Hill Top. Several callers dropped in after tea, and they vied with each other in telling of their pranks.

"I believe, after all, the Hollands have suffered

more than the rest of us," said Miss Gardner, one of the guests.

"I don't know," Mrs. Brent replied, "I thought I had about the worst of it when they painted Oscar sky blue. It took me a week to get it off."

"But don't you remember the Hollands' door bell?" Miss Gardner continued. "It was an electric bell, Miss Mallory, with a handle you pulled down in order to ring it. Well, these imps devised the plan of tying a weight to it, causing the bell to ring furiously till some one came and released it. After this had happened a number of times, they had a button put in instead of the handle, and then the children discovered that pressing back the button and sticking in a pin or tack answered just as well."

"What was the end of it?" Miss Mallory asked.

"Mr. McLean was appealed to, but by that time they were tired of it themselves and began to think of something else. Their latest performance was ornamenting our stone walks with drawings in colored chalk."

"I'm afraid Oscar had a hand in that," sighed Mrs. Brent.

"On last Fourth of July I thought they would

certainly kill themselves and perhaps all the rest of us," said Mr. Brent.

"I don't know, of course, but I do not believe they are as bad as you think they are," Miss Mallory said, after listening to these and many other stories of the same kind. "They evidently love excitement, and I fancy they have been aggravated in some way, and like young savages they enjoy a little vengeance."

Miss Mallory spoke so earnestly that Mr. Brent laughed. "Now, Prue, what do you know about children, shut up for four years in college?" he asked.

"I don't pretend to know much, but I have an excellent memory, and I recall the days when I was a young savage myself, and I know I was not as bad as some people thought me," was her reply.

CHAPTER SECOND.

COUSIN PRUE.

HILL TOP was a pretty little suburb overlooking from its breezy height the great smoky city with its noisy factories and busy wharves. On all sides there were charming views of hills and valley and the broad winding river. The houses—there were not more than a dozen—stood well apart in the midst of smooth lawns, which with the fine old forest trees and the flowers and the absence of fences gave the place a park-like appearance. The electric cars that whizzed up and down the hill every half hour, and the passing of an occasional grocery wagon or carriage, made just enough noise to remind you how quiet it was.

Truly it was a pleasant place to live in, Miss Mallory thought, as she walked over to the McLeans' the next morning; and yet if all she had heard were true, half a dozen naughty children quite spoiled its peace and beauty.

Miss Mallory herself looked as fresh and bright as the morning, and though her face wore a thoughtful expression, as if she were trying to make up her mind about something, she had also an air of cheerful determination that said she would be equal to anything she might undertake.

Old Mr. Holland, who sat on his porch with his stout stick and his wheezy old pug beside him, wondered who this fine-looking young woman could be, while she couldn't help smiling a little at his grim appearance.

The children were playing quoits on the lawn, a game Pranks enjoyed as much as anybody, for he ran back and forth and barked with delight whenever the ring touched the stake. He and Malcolm spied Miss Mallory at the same moment, and came racing to meet her, followed presently by the others.

"Mother said to bring you to her as soon as you came," Mary Hyacinth said.

"And she says you are our cousin," Malcolm added.

"Why, certainly I am, and after I've had a little visit with her I'd like to play a game with you; may I?"

Of course she might! A new playfellow was always welcome, and a charming, grown-up young lady like this was not often to be had.

Mary conducted Miss Mallory to her mother, a sweet, delicate-looking woman, who had been an invalid for two years, and who greeted the visitor with: "I am so glad to see you, Prue, and I hope you are going to do what I wish!"

Mary wanted to stay and hear what it was her mother wished, but Mrs. McLean sent her away. The visit lasted till the lunch bell rang, and the children, who had been hovering anxiously about for two hours, were inclined to be indignant till they found Cousin Prue was to stay to lunch. When that was over, they took possession of her. The five—for Arthur and Susan Scott were as usual with their cousins—escorted her over the place, all talking at once, and so fast it is a wonder she had anything but a hopeless jumble of ideas in her head. She took a lively interest in all their pets: the pigeons, the little chickens, the solemn Maltese cat, and, best of all, the pony. She liked all sorts of games, and could play tennis and basket-ball, and could row and swim. The boys began to look upon her with immense respect, and Mary and

Susan decided that they would be exactly like her when they were young ladies.

When they had shown her everything they could think of, they seated themselves in a sociable group under the Ginckgo tree to cool off and talk.

"What were you all so interested in with your heads close together as I came up from the station yesterday?" Miss Mallory asked.

Mary, who sat facing her, looked embarrassed, but Malcolm answered promptly: "Mary Hyacinth was telling us about a lady who is coming to take care of us while mother and father are away."

"I wasn't at all, Malcolm; I don't know anything about her. Mother just said she had asked somebody," said his sister.

"You said you knew she wouldn't be nice, and that you weren't going to mind her," said Susan.

"Yes, you did," insisted Malcolm.

"And you said——" chimed in Wyllis, who was a tease and couldn't resist the temptation to annoy Mary; but Cousin Prue came to the rescue.

"Never mind," she said. "Do you know I have been talking to your mother about this very person?"

"Do you know her?" asked Susan.

"Very well, indeed, and I think perhaps you will like her. At any rate it will make your mother feel more comfortable about you to have her here, and I am sure you'll be glad of that."

"But we don't need any one beside Miss Janet," insisted Mary. Now Miss Janet was the house-keeper and the person who, of all others, most spoiled these five children.

"And it is sure to be somebody who says 'Don't,' and 'You mustn't do that; it isn't proper,' from morning till night," said Wyllis.

"That will depend on how you behave, I should say," replied Miss Mallory.

"Do you suppose she would tell us stories sometimes, or read to us?" Malcolm asked anxiously.

Cousin Prue, regardless of the fact that he was such a big boy, kissed the rosy cheek so near her, as she answered: "Yes, indeed; she loves stories herself and likes to tell them."

"Cousin Prue! is it you? Was that what mamma meant? Oh, do say it is! do say it is!" cried Mary in sudden excitement, that spread in an instant to the others.

"I am considering it," said Miss Mallory, "but I must warn you that I am a very stern person."

Though I appear amiable, I am dreadful when I'm roused. Cousin Mary wrote and asked me if I would come and stay with you, but I was not willing to decide till I had seen you and you had seen me, for if we could not begin by liking each other, it would not do at all. So if I come, it will be because you want me."

"Indeed we do, Cousin Prue," cried Mary.

"It will be awfully jolly," said Wyllis.

"And we'll be good, indeed we will; won't we, Arthur?" Susan added; while Malcolm patted his new cousin's hand and looked up in her face with a beaming smile. "Indeed we will," he echoed.

"Why, there is Oscar," said Cousin Prue, seeing a melancholy little figure on the sidewalk. "Suppose we ask him in?"

"I'm mad at him," Malcolm objected.

"But Oscar is a friend of mine," said Miss Malory, "and if I'm to stay here I'd like the privilege of seeing my friends."

This settled it.

"Hello, Oscar! come in here!" called Malcolm, and Oscar came with a radiant face.

CHAPTER THIRD.

THE FALL OF JERICHO.

GREAT was everybody's surprise when it became known that Miss Mallory was going to stay with the McLean children through the summer.

"Some one ought to tell her," old Mr. Holland exclaimed when Miss Gardner came over with the news.

"She has been told, but she refuses to believe; I suppose she thinks we have dreamed it all," replied the lady.

"Prudence can manage them if any one can," said Mr. Brent.

Within two weeks it was settled; Miss Mallory was installed, Mr. and Mrs. Scott went away with the McLeans, and Susan and Arthur came to stay with their cousins. The children were in a gale of delight over the arrangement and promised again and again to be good, and for several days this promise was kept. Cousin Prue made herself their com-

panion; walked and drove and played games with them, told stories and read to them, and keeping her eyes and ears open meanwhile she learned a great deal about them. She discovered that the reason the children had so great a dislike for Thomas, the Hollands' man-servant, was because he had once thrown a stone at Pranks, which had cut his leg and lamed him badly for a time. Dear little Pranks, with his funny ways and kind merry eyes—who blamed his playfellows for resenting it? But of course it did not excuse their throwing mud on the clean porch.

They were truthful and affectionate, but their overflowing life and energy made them only too ready to carry out the many daring suggestions supplied by Mary's busy brain. Poor little Oscar, who was a delicate child with not half the endurance of sturdy Malcolm, was their faithful follower, sometimes petted but oftener teased and imposed upon, and almost certain to come to grief in their mischief. However, as a friend of Cousin Prue's, he found himself treated with a new consideration. He was no longer left to lag farther and farther behind when in some long walk his short legs grew tired; there was a kind hand ready to help him

now, and some one to propose a rest and to make it delightful with a story. Oscar was happy as a lark.

But pleasant weather can't last forever, and so one morning they woke to find the rain coming steadily down in a way that meant business, Miss Janet said. It happened unfortunately that the evening before a cousin of Mr. McLean's had arrived to spend a few days. She was a nervous, fussy person and an incessant talker, and Miss Mallory was obliged to devote herself to her entertainment, leaving the children to their own devices.

They did very well for a while, but their interest in quiet indoor games was exhausted before lunch time, and they began to be so very noisy on the porch just outside the window of the library, where Miss Mallory and Mrs. Campbell were sitting, that the former had to ask them to go upstairs to play where they would not annoy the visitor.

"I know something lovely to play," Mary exclaimed, as they lingered in the hall after lunch was over. Oscar had arrived a few minutes before, having been so lonely and unhappy all morning that his mother sent him over in the carriage.

"Well, what is it?" Wyllis asked.

"Never mind, it will be splendid fun and we'll

play it in the nursery, and you must find everything you can think of that will make a noise," was Mary's reply.

"I thought Cousin Prue said we mustn't make any noise," said Arthur.

"Oh, she just meant down here," answered his sister, anxious not to have the fun interrupted.

"Anything that would make a noise" certainly had an interesting sound, so away they scampered to the nursery where Mary unfolded her plan. It was to be the fall of Jericho, the story of which they had had for a Sunday-school lesson a few weeks before.

"Don't you remember how they marched around the city once a day for six days, and then on the seventh day marched around seven times, and the seventh time they shouted and blew trumpets and the walls fell down?"

"But what are you going to have for the wall?" asked the others.

"I'll show you," said Mary; "just come up to the lumber room." They followed obediently and she gave her orders like a general.

"Wyllis, you and Arthur take these curtain frames down, and then find all the tin tubs and basins you

can; and Malcolm and Oscar can take those," pointing to two brass coal buckets stored away for the summer. "Susan, you bring that box of pebbles, and we must find all the checkers and dominoes, and—oh, yes, Malcolm, you ask Tina to let you have the clothespins, they'll rattle beautifully."

Really, there seemed to be no end to the things that would make a noise; something new continually suggested itself until they had a wonderful collection.

"What do you want, dear?" Cousin Prue asked Malcolm, who came softly into the library.

"Just the checker board," was the reply, and she gave it to him, remarking that checkers was a nice game for a rainy day.

It was at least an hour—and they worked like beavers—before the wall, as Mary called it, was complete. The curtain frames were supported on the backs of chairs, and across them were placed the tin bath tubs, in which were all sorts of rattling things; across these, again, were placed waiters and pans, likewise filled. As the building went on the children grew very much interested and excited, and several times their enthusiasm came near upsetting it too soon.

"I can't think of another thing," Wyllis said, as he carefully deposited a pair of tongs on the very top.

"It will do now," Mary answered, surveying it with pride, adding, "and, remember, when we have gone around the last time, you and Arthur are to pull the frames out so the things will fall."

Some minutes later Miss Janet, on her way down stairs, glanced in at the nursery door. The six children, led by Mary, were marching solemnly around a curious looking structure in the middle of the room; some of them carried horns, Malcolm had a drum, and Arthur a tin pan and a hammer, but they were as quiet as mice, and Pranks sat looking on as if he did not understand this singular game. Miss Janet stopped at the library door to tell Miss Prue the children were playing like lambs.

The words were hardly out of her mouth when there arose a terrible din, such as none of them had ever before heard. There was a crash and a clatter, a blowing of horns, a pounding of drums and tin pans, a screaming and barking that was altogether bewildering and terrifying. The visitor was frightened into hysterics. Leaving her to Miss Janet's care, Miss Mallory rushed upstairs, followed by Tina, the housemaid.

The children were dancing and shouting like savages, and the room was strewn from one end to the other with the wreck of their wall. So great was the excitement, no one had noticed that Oscar's screams were from pain.

In some way he had been struck by one of the frames, and the pins had made an ugly cut on the side of his face.

Cousin Prue's appearance caused a sudden lull, though she said not a single word as she rescued a chair from the ruins, and sitting down, took Oscar on her lap; then she asked for hot water and a sponge.

Under the soothing power of the warm water and the soft voice his crying soon ceased. The others stood around in a somewhat embarrassed silence.

"I didn't know he was hurt," Mary said in an aggrieved tone, as if some one had been scolding her.

"I am awfully sorry, Oscar," added Susan.

"Does it hurt?" inquired Malcolm.

"Yes, it does," said Oscar, beginning to cry again.

"I told Mary you said not to make a noise," Arthur remarked with an air of great virtue.

"She said downstairs; didn't you, Cousin Prue?"

And any way, you made as much as anybody," Mary retorted.

"I'll tell you what I believe I'll do, Oscar," said Miss Mallory, in a cheerful tone, glancing toward the window; "it isn't raining now, so suppose you and I take the next car and go down to Dr. Richardson's office and get him to put a plaster on your cut. I haven't any of the right kind, but he will do it up nicely for us, and mamma will not know anything about it until it is all done."

"Let me go with you, Cousin Prue?" Malcolm ventured to ask.

"No, I thank you; I think it will take all of you all the rest of the afternoon to get these things put away," was her reply.

They looked at each other doubtfully after she had gone.

"Do you think she is mad?" asked Arthur.

"Don't care if she is," said Wyllis.

"We haven't done anything; Oscar is always getting hurt," added Susan.

"And I am not going to pick up all these things either," declared Mary, and at this Susan dropped the handful of clothespins she had gathered. Malcolm, however, kept steadily on putting away the

checkers and dominoes. He felt sure Cousin Prue was displeased with them, and though he was not quite certain why, he meant to do his part toward restoring order, since she evidently expected it.

He worked away with a very sober face, and as it did not seem fair to let him do it alone, the others presently began to help; and after a while Tina came and lent a hand, groaning over the dents and scratches on her brass buckets.

Miss Janet was trying meanwhile to soothe Mrs. Campbell's wounded feelings, for no sooner had the lady recovered sufficiently from her fright to understand the cause of the noise than her indignation rose. She took it as a personal affront, and in high dudgeon insisted upon leaving at once.

The sun was setting in a glory of rose color and gold when the tea-bell rang; the storm was over. The children came in, looking subdued and casting questioning glances toward Miss Mallory, who sat very erect behind the tea things. Mary unconsciously straightened herself in her chair, and Wyllis, who in a moment of forgetfulness, had put his elbows on the table, quickly removed them. No one spoke for a few minutes, then Malcolm said: "I picked some Susan-eyed daisies for you, Cousin Prue,

but Mary said you wouldn't want them," and he smiled at her appealingly.

"Thank you; I shall be very glad to have them. What did you say they were?" she asked with an answering smile.

"He means Black-eyed Susans," Wyllis explained with an elder brother's scorn.

"Susan's eyes are black," said Malcolm, looking at her critically from across the table.

"So they are, and it is really a very nice name for the daisies," said Cousin Prue.

"I wish she would say something, and not just look at us in that funny way," Mary said to Susan as they were getting ready for bed that night.

Down in the library Cousin Prue was sitting alone, thinking. For a long time she looked straight before her without moving, then, just as the clock struck ten, she exclaimed half aloud: "I believe it is the very thing! I'll try it!"

CHAPTER FOURTH.

THINKING CAPS.

ON the next day each of the children received a note addressed and sealed. They were all alike and read: "You are invited to be present at a meeting to be held under the sycamore tree in the Green lot to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, for the purpose of forming a T. C. Circle." This was all, but of course Cousin Prue must have written them, they were sure of that. When they asked her, however, though she did not deny it, she would not give any explanation, only saying they must wait till to-morrow.

The Green lot might have had its name from the luxuriant growth of grass and weeds that struggled together for possession of it, but the real reason was that it was owned by a Mr. Green, who intended some day to build there. It had been fenced about in a careless fashion that kept no one out who wished to get in, and when the children grew tired

of smooth lawns and stone walks, here was a delightful playground.

Under a picturesque old sycamore that grew on the brow of the hill, where the ground sloped gently away to the south and the lovely view of valley and river stretched into the distance, there was a shady spot perfectly adapted to story telling and quiet games; here the meeting was to be held.

For some unknown reason they overslept themselves next morning, and when they came down stairs Cousin Prue had had her breakfast and gone—to the city, Tina thought.

“Gone to the city!” cried Mary.

“She must have forgotten,” said Susan.

“That would be too mean after telling us to meet her in the Green lot,” Wyllis added.

“Cousin Prue doesn’t forget things; I know she’ll come,” and loyal Malcolm buttered his cornbread contentedly.

“She will come back on the ten o’clock car, I guess,” said Arthur, and as this seemed quite likely, they ate their breakfast cheerfully and then went out on the porch to wait for her. Wyllis suggested going to the sycamore tree at once, but Mary Hyacinth frowned upon the proposal. “What’s the

use?" she asked, swinging back and forth in the hammock. "I'd rather wait here and go with Cousin Prue."

A few minutes before ten Susan and the boys ran off to the back gallery, from one corner of which the car could be plainly seen just before it reached the station. At length came the buzzing, grating sound as it climbed the steep grade; but alas! no Cousin Prue was to be seen, only two men and a stout woman with a market basket.

"It is just as mean!" they cried, running back to Mary; all but Malcolm, who sat on the steps thinking, with Pranks beside him. His faith in Cousin Prue was strong; she always did what she said she would, and it was very unlike her to ask them to meet her, and then forget it.

He believed he'd go any way, but without telling the others, who would certainly laugh at him.

The children on the front porch grew more and more indignant as time passed and no Cousin Prue. When the clock struck half-past ten, Wyllis suggested again that they go to the meeting place any way, and the others agreed for lack of anything else to do.

* "I wonder where Malcolm is?" said Mary; but

as he did not answer their calls they started off without him.

They had not far to go; just down the street to where the stone walk ended, then along a well-trodden path to a fence corner, through which they squeezed themselves. When presently they came within sight of the sycamore tree, two heads were visible above the slope of the hill; one of them wore Malcolm's straw hat, the other such a peculiar black cap that they did not at first recognize Cousin Prue.

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"Tina said you had gone to the city, and we waited and waited!"

"How did Malcolm know? And how did you get here?"

The two serene individuals, who appeared to be having an exceedingly good time, gazed at these breathless questioners with calm surprise.

"I don't understand; but you are very late. It is twenty-five minutes of eleven," Miss Mallory said, looking at her watch. "It seems Malcolm is the only one who can be depended on to keep an appointment."

"But, Cousin Prue, Tina said you had gone to the city, and we waited and waited and you weren't on

the car, so we thought you had forgotten," Mary explained.

"I was anxious to keep my appointment, and knowing a short cut I took it," was Miss Mallory's answer.

"I know!" cried Arthur; "you got off at Pine-wood and walked up; I never thought of that."

"You jumped to a conclusion of your own, and it didn't occur to you that I really meant what I said when I asked you to meet me here."

At this the children looked disconsolate, for evidently they had offended Cousin Prue again.

Miss Mallory surveyed the sober faces for a moment, then one of those merry smiles that seemed made of equal parts of sweetness and mischief lightened her face. "Children," she began, "we do want to have a good time together this summer, don't we?"

Five heads nodded emphatically, and a relieved expression took the place of the disconsolate one.

"But," she continued, "I have come to the conclusion that in order to have a really good time we shall have to have a T. C. Circle. T. C. stands for Thinking Cap, and I went down to the city to get mine—my college cap—to show you. People never

amount to anything until they learn to use their thinking caps properly, and unfortunately a great many persons never do. They even go through college without learning, and the result is they are a nuisance to their friends all their lives.

"Now, I have noticed that you don't use yours very well, and I am sure you could have much more fun if you did, so it occurred to me that we might start a little society, and have a motto, perhaps, and wear caps instead of badges. This sort of cap does as well for a boy as a girl."

"I'd like that," said Susan. "Mother belongs to a society, and she has a badge, a gold pin with letters on it."

"But, Cousin Prue, I do think of a great many things," Mary said in an aggrieved tone.

"You mean a great many ideas come into your head; but that is not the sort of thinking I mean. Even Pranks thinks in that way."

At the sound of his name Pranks got up and walking round the circle sat down beside Miss Mallory, wagging his tail and looking very wise, as if trying to make her illustration as impressive as possible.

"Pranksie knows a lot," said Wyllis.

"But you will agree with me that more should be expected of his two-legged friends, won't you?" and Cousin Prue patted the smooth head so prettily marked in brown and black.

"If you decide to have a Thinking Cap Circle," she continued, "we might take for our motto, 'Forethought and fun.' You know there are two kinds of fun, one that is harmless and delightful, and another that always brings discomfort, perhaps even suffering, to somebody. Now, members of the T. C. Circle cannot have anything to do with this last kind of fun, if they are true to their motto. Do you know what forethought is?"

"Is it thinking before?" asked Arthur.

"Yes, it means stopping to think, each for himself, before rushing into all sorts of mischief just because some one proposes it."

"You can't have a bit of fun if you have to stop and think," Mary objected.

"Do you really mean you can't have a good time without annoying some one else?"

"Why, Cousin Prue!" they all exclaimed, for this was putting it rather strong, and Mary added, "I suppose you are thinking about the fall of Jericho, but I didn't know Oscar would get in the way,

and you only said not to make a noise down stairs."

"But if you had stopped to think I am sure you would have known that a noise like that was out of the question in the house, particularly when we had a visitor, and you wouldn't have taken those brass buckets, and you would have been more careful of little Oscar. He is not nearly so strong as the rest of you, and has been made a baby of at home, and I am sure you believe that it is the part of the strong to look out for the weak. Fortunately, he was not so badly hurt as I feared, and he was very brave about it. I wish there was some way in which we could make his mother believe that nothing like this will happen again. I feel very uncomfortable about it."

"Why, it wasn't your fault, Cousin Prue," said Mary.

"Yes, you see I am in a manner responsible for you now; at least that is the way other people look at it," she answered.

This was a new idea; Mary looked sober, for she had decided views of what she called fairness.

"Of course," Miss Mallory continued, "I do not believe you really wish to be unkind and rude, and

for that reason I think you will like my Thinking Cap Circle."

As they talked it over they all came to this conclusion too. They decided to call themselves the T. C.s, and not tell the name, and to have weekly meetings, under the sycamore when the weather was good, and upon these occasions they would all wear caps which Cousin Prue promised to provide. The color of these was an important matter; the boys voted for red, the girls for blue, and with Miss Mallory's vote this made a tie. Then Malcolm came over to that side, and the blues had it.

When the business part of the meeting was over, Cousin Prue brought out some sponge cakes and sweet chocolate for refreshments, and as they lay on the grass and looked out on the river, where busy ferryboats plied to and fro, and long trains puffed back and forth across the high bridge—but all too far away to disturb the quiet—and overhead the great white clouds floated in the deep summer blue, making soft moving shadows over the sunny fields, something of the beauty of stillness stole into their hearts. Then Miss Mallory told them a story—a very old story—about a king who went on a journey to a far country, leaving his kingdom in

charge of his servants. It suggested something to Mary.

"Let's pretend that father and mother are a king and queen, and have gone away and left us to take care of things for them," she said.

"That is a beautiful idea, and it is true, too," replied Cousin Prue, "and in that case the work of our Thinking Cap Circle will be to take charge of the affairs of our kingdom and see that it is ruled in the best possible way."

CHAPTER FIFTH.

THE PROFESSOR.

"WHAT do you suppose those children are up to now?" Miss Gardner stood at her corner window, from which she had an extended view down the street in the direction of the Green lot.

Her mother, looking over her shoulder, beheld six sedate young persons marching in single file, Mary Hyacinth at the head and Oscar bringing up the rear, each wearing a blue cap of the mortar board variety, with a jaunty tassel falling over the crown.

"I wonder how Miss Mallory is enjoying herself. Really, I think the children have been more quiet lately," said Mrs. Gardner.

"They have done nothing worth mentioning except half kill Oscar Brent; I wonder his mother allows him to be with them," was Miss Gardner's reply.

There were some things this lady did not know, and one was that after the first meeting of the Thinking Cap Circle Mary Hyacinth had gone to

Mrs. Brent and asked her to let Oscar play with them again.

"We are sorry he got hurt, and we are going to be more careful after this; and it wasn't Cousin Prue's fault at all, because she was in the library and did not know what we were doing."

Mrs. Brent was very much surprised, but accepted the apology graciously.

"I wasn't going to have her blaming Cousin Prue," Mary explained to the others, who were waiting for her around the corner.

"It is nonsense; how could she be blamed?" said Wyllis.

"That is the way people do, though," put in Arthur with a wise air. "I heard Mrs. Holland tell Mrs. Gardner that she didn't think much of your mother, after Malcolm threw mud on their clean porch."

"I guess she meant your mother didn't know how to bring you up," Susan added.

"I don't care," exclaimed Wyllis, but he did not look as if he liked it exactly, and Mary walked home with a very grave face.

So the delighted Oscar became a member of the T. C. Circle.

About five minutes after the children had passed, Miss Mallory herself went by, carrying her camera and wearing a blue cap exactly like the others. She smiled and nodded to old Mr. Holland, and asked about his rheumatism in a neighborly way, and as she walked on with her light step and the smile still on her face, Mrs. Gardner could have no reason for thinking she was not enjoying herself.

Under the sycamore tree the children were grouped around the seat of honor, a large straw cushion, which awaited Cousin Prue.

"How dear you all look in your caps," she said, surveying the bright faces.

"And so do you!" they replied with one voice.

"And now," she said, taking possession of the straw cushion, "we have two important matters to attend to this afternoon. First you are to have your pictures taken, and then we must decide how we shall celebrate the Fourth of July, which comes next week."

Cousin Prue had chosen a sunny spot on the hillside and grouped them to her satisfaction when Pranks' absence was discovered, and Malcolm remembered that he had been shut in the carriage house for barking at the laundry man in an un-

seemly way. Now, a picture without Pranks was not to be thought of, so he and Oscar went back to release him.

When the little boys reached the house, they found Professor Ellis sitting on a bench on the lawn reading a book. It happened that this bench had been freshly painted that morning and put out in the sun to dry quickly, Miss Janet never for a moment thinking any one was likely to sit on it; but now that the shadow of the house had reached it, and a pleasant breeze played about it, the professor found it inviting.

"How are you, Malcolm?" he said, closing his book. He was a friend of Mr. McLean's and well acquainted with the children.

Malcolm looked very intently at him as he replied, "I'm well; father has gone to Europe."

"So I heard; is no one else at home?"

"No, mother has gone too, and Miss Janet has gone to town, and there is no one here but Lucinda, and I 'spect she is asleep."

"Is Miss Mallory out, too?" asked the professor.

"Why, do you know Cousin Prue? She's over in the Green lot; we are having a meeting there. I

guess that paint is sticky yet," Malcolm added thoughtfully.

Professor Ellis rose hurriedly. "I fear it is," he exclaimed, twisting his neck in an effort to see his back.

Malcolm walked around him. "There's some on your trousers and a lot on your coat; isn't there, Oscar?" he remarked consolingly.

"I wonder if you have any turpentine," said the professor.

"Is it something in a bottle?" Malcolm asked, after a moment's thought.

"Yes; it is a liquid."

"I thought that was whiskey," exclaimed the child.

"No, no; you must be thinking of liquor," answered the professor smiling.

"Miss Janet has lots of things in her medicine chest, and one day when I got some paint on my coat she rubbed it off with something out of a bottle."

"Malcolm, I know!" cried Oscar, "it was Dr. Warren."

"Why, so it was! I'll get it. You just come with me, Professor Ellis," and Malcolm led the way

with Oscar, followed by the amused gentleman who wondered who or what Dr. Warren might be.

Leaving him on the kitchen porch with the astonished Lucinda, who was dozing there over her knitting, Malcolm ran off, returning presently with a large bottle, which, sure enough, was half full of turpentine.

With Lucinda's help the paint was soon removed and then the professor wanted to know why they called the bottle Dr. Warren.

Oscar looked very much abashed, and Malcolm said, "You'll laugh at us if we tell you."

The professor insisted that he would not, and so the children were persuaded to explain that they were in the habit of playing Sunday-school with the bottles in Miss Janet's medicine closet.

"You know they do look like people with hats on," Malcolm said, "and so we name them, and we call that one Dr. Warren because it is so fat."

Professor Ellis found it rather hard to keep his promise not to laugh, for he knew Dr. Warren and saw the resemblance, but he managed to put on a very grave face as he said: "I think that must be a most interesting game, and I am very greatly obliged to you and Dr. Warren. And now, don't

you think you could let me come to your meeting?"

The children did not know what to say to this, but it seemed inhospitable to leave him alone there to wait for his car, so Malcolm said: "Well, you can come, and if Cousin Prue lets you, you can stay."

Miss Mallory and the other children were beginning to wonder what could have happened to the little boys, when Pranks came scampering across the grass, beside himself with joy at being released, and not far behind were his three companions.

Cousin Prue was very much surprised to see the professor, but she gave him a cordial greeting, and no one seemed to think of objecting to his staying. This was probably because he began at once to make himself useful. He took the picture for them so that Cousin Prue could be in it, and when this was done he took his place in the circle quite as if he belonged there and owned a blue cap.

"Now, if the meeting is in order, we'll proceed to discuss how we shall celebrate the Fourth," said Miss Mallory.

"Last year we had cannon crackers, and packs and packs of the others, and rockets, and Roman candles, and lots of things," put in Wyllis.

"And Arthur had a toy cannon and burned himself with the powder, so papa said he couldn't have it any more," added Susan.

"I know a boy who had two fingers blown off!" exclaimed Malcolm excitedly.

"Pooh! there isn't a bit of danger if you are careful; I'm not afraid," said Mary.

"Don't you think for variety we might celebrate in a different way this year?" Cousin Prue suggested.

"There isn't any other way," insisted Wyllis.

"Does any one know a reason why we should not have a noisy Fourth?" There was a dead silence as Cousin Prue looked around the circle.

"I think you do know," she continued, "that Mrs. Morris is very sick. It may be hard for you to understand, but noise hurts her more than a switch would hurt you if I struck you with it. Now, I do not think you could enjoy your Fourth if you knew it was torturing some one else; but I leave it with you to decide whether or not we shall try to have a quiet day."

"I suppose we must, but it will be too stupid!" cried Mary with a woe-begone face.

"Do you know," began the professor, "it is really

becoming a serious question in the minds of many persons how to put a stop to the damage done every year by Fourth of July celebrations. I don't know how many cases of lockjaw they had at the city hospital last year as a result of accidents on that day. I don't think the T. C. Circle could do better than start a reform, and if you'll let me help, I think I know of a gorgeous plan,—the very next thing to a big noise."

Unless he was a most hard-hearted individual the professor must have felt rewarded by the grateful glance Cousin Prue bestowed upon him.

The children of course were eager to hear what he considered the next best thing to a big noise, and listened like mice while he explained, and certainly it did sound interesting.

"Do you really think we can do it?" Miss Malory asked; adding: "Then, children, let's keep it a secret and surprise the neighborhood!"

They all clapped their hands at this and went home as gay as larks, and the professor stayed to tea.

CHAPTER SIXTH.

THE GREAT PYRAMID.

“You are invited by the T. C. Circle of Hill Top
To be present at an exhibition of the Great Pyramid
on Reservoir Hill

Soon after sundown, on July the Fourth.”

THESE invitations, each ornamented with a tiny flag, were sent to all their neighbors in Hill Top, and to a few of their city friends.

Of course there was much curiosity as to what this Great Pyramid might be, but the children kept the secret well, and only Mr. Brent, who was to help the professor, knew anything about it.

“If I could have just one cannon cracker I don’t believe I should mind,” said Wyllis.

It was the day before the Fourth, and they were getting their decorations ready, and while Cousin Prue was busy in the house, they were on the back porch putting candles in the lanterns.

“It is going to be lovely, and I don’t mind a bit,” answered Susan.

"Well," said Mary, snipping off a piece of wire, "I am willing to try it because I said I would. What I like about Cousin Prue is that she doesn't say we must do things, but let's us decide ourselves."

"You'd feel pretty mean if you didn't do what she wanted you to," Arthur remarked.

"When Cousin Prue tells us we mustn't do anything, she always tells us something we may do," added Wyllis. "She doesn't just say 'don't.'"

Old Mr. Holland, out for his morning walk, met Miss Mallory returning from Mrs. Brent's.

"What's all this nonsense about the Great Pyramid?" he inquired.

"That is a secret; you must come and see," she replied.

"Those children came near killing me last year, and I don't intend to stand it again," he continued grimly.

"You needn't be afraid, for we are going to try a new way of celebrating the Fourth," Miss Mallory said smiling.

"Well, I guess if you have anything to do with it, it is pretty sure to be a good way," the old man remarked; and coming from Mr. Holland this was a great compliment.

In spite of some gray clouds the evening before, the morning of the Fourth was delightfully bright and clear, and also delightfully quiet, some persons thought. It would of course be too much to say that the children did not regret their firecrackers. Now and then a distant boom from the city reminded them of what they were missing; but they were too busy helping to hang lanterns and flags, and racing over to Reservoir Hill, where the professor was putting the finishing touches to the pyramid, to think much about it.

Reservoir Hill, which was only a small mound, was all that was left of a reservoir begun years before and then abandoned for a better site, and as it was about a quarter of a mile from any of the houses of Hill Top, had been chosen by the professor for their celebration.

The McLeans' lawn presented a festive appearance when about five o'clock the guests from the city arrived. Flags were flying, the trees and porches were hung with Japanese lanterns, and the T. C.s resplendent in costumes of red, white and blue.

They played all sorts of games, in which Cousin Prue and the professor joined with as much spirit

as if they were only ten years old themselves; and then Miss Janet gave them the nicest sort of a little supper. After this they marched all over Hill Top with their flags and lanterns, ending at Reservoir Hill, where a number of persons had already assembled to look at the pyramid.

It was built of barrels of all sizes, beginning at the bottom with hogsheads and ending with lard kegs, and from the very top waved a flag.

"Is that all?" said one little girl; "I don't think it is very pretty," but later on she changed her mind.

There were benches and camp stools for the grown people, and the children sat on the grass or ran about as they pleased. As it was not quite dark yet, the professor made a little speech while they waited, explaining why the T. C. Circle had decided to have a quiet Fourth. He told how many accidents resulted every year from Fourth of July celebrations, and how sick people everywhere suffered from the noise. Just across the river, he said, there lived a little boy who a year ago had been so badly hurt by an explosion that he had not been able to walk since. This boy had been told about the pyramid, and was watching for it.

While he talked the stars began to come out, and then little tongues of flame began to creep around the big hogsheads, and they grew and grew, and rose higher and higher, until they were like great wings of fire that could be seen for miles around. As the flames crackled and roared and reached up toward the brave little flag at the top, the children decided it was better than a hundred rockets, and taking hands they danced and sang like a lot of merry savages. It was an exciting moment when at last the flag went down. Even the grown people agreed that it was the finest bonfire they had ever seen, and the children refused to leave till every spark was out. The rockets and Roman candles sent up by some of the neighbors later in the evening really seemed quite tame.

"Well, Mary," said Professor Ellis as he was leaving, "do you think it was almost as good as a big noise?"

"It has been the nicest Fourth we ever had," she exclaimed.

The next day the T. C. Circle received a note from Mr. Morris thanking them for not making a noise on the Fourth, and saying his wife had been able to enjoy the bonfire from her window.

"I don't think we ought to be thanked when we had such a good time ourselves," Mary said.

"Still you were willing to give up what you thought would give you the most pleasure," answered Cousin Prue.

"I think we ought to thank Professor Ellis," Wyllis said.

"Why, we did, last night," replied Arthur.

"But I mean write him a note or something."

"Let's make him an honorary member of the Circle," Miss Mallory suggested.

This idea pleased them all, and not long after, the professor found a very elegant note in his mail, composed by the Circle, and written by Wyllis, informing him that he had been made an honorary member of the Thinking Cap Circle.

CHAPTER SEVENTH.

FLOWERS AND WEEDS.

ONE Sunday morning they sat with Cousin Prue under the sycamore tree. It was too warm to go to the city to church, so they were having a little service of their own on the hillside. After they had each said a Bible verse, Cousin Prue told them the story of the Sower who went forth to sow; and as they looked down on the sunny fields and the shining river it seemed quite real; they could almost see the little boat on the Sea of Galilee where Jesus sat and talked to the people gathered on the shore.

"By the good ground," she said, "He meant honest and good hearts that take care of the little seeds of truth, and do not let unkind, unlovely thoughts choke them."

Malcolm looked as if he did not understand, so she continued:

"Don't you know that good thoughts are like flower seeds, that, if they have a chance, will grow and bloom? Suppose the thought that because God

is good to us we ought to be good to each other, comes into our hearts, and after it has been planted a little weed named selfishness begins to grow beside it, and we say: 'But I can't have a good time myself if I have to think about other people.' Or perhaps it is the weed of anger that tries to choke it, and we say: 'That person isn't kind to me, so I won't be kind to him.' Now if we pull up these ugly weeds by the roots and go on trying to be kind, the thought of love grows stronger and stronger till it blooms in all kinds of lovely ways, and the weeds have no longer any power over it."

Malcolm smiled as if the idea pleased him, and Mary said, "I never thought of that."

"You know," Miss Mallory went on, "nothing is so important as our thoughts. There is a proverb in the Bible which says, 'As he thinketh in his heart, so is he.' If we think kind, sweet, earnest thoughts, we shall be kind, sweet, earnest people. You see it brings us back to our thinking caps. And there is one thing we must remember: it is God who gives us right thoughts. He is the head gardener, and we take care of our little garden plots for Him."

At this moment Pranks pricked up his ears and

sat very erect, as if he heard something interesting in the distance, and in another second away he rushed through the trees. By this time the sound of growling and yelping had reached the ears of the children, who with one accord ran after him, followed more slowly by Miss Mallory.

Down in a little ravine in the hillside not far away, poor Snuff, who was taking a quiet stroll, had been attacked by an ugly yellow cur, and being too fat and wheezy to defend himself, was having a very bad time. He must have thought, if he thought at all, that the game was up when Pranks came rushing in. But though Pranks delighted in teasing the old pug, he was not one to fail a neighbor in time of need; beside this, he knew the yellow dog to be an ungentlemanly cur, and he charged upon him so fiercely and unexpectedly that when the children appeared the enemy was almost routed.

Poor old Snuff was pretty well used up, and lay wheezing and panting, quite unable to walk, while Pranks was in such a state of excitement he had to be held to keep him from following the retreating foe down the hill.

"Poor old Snuff! what shall we do with him?" asked Miss Mallory.

"Let's put him on the straw cushion and take him home that way. We can pretend he is a wounded soldier," Mary proposed, and as nobody thought of a better plan, they proceeded to carry it out.

It was a funny procession, headed by Wyllis and Arthur bearing the pug on the cushion between them, and Pranks, the hero of the occasion, still bristling with excitement, tightly clasped under Malcolm's arm.

"What have you done to my dog?" old Mr. Holland demanded, coming down the walk to meet them.

Miss Mallory explained, while the boys carefully deposited Snuff on the door mat.

"Well, I declare!" he said, adding as if somewhat embarrassed at the turn affairs had taken, "I'm much obliged to you, children."

Malcolm was not going to have his pet overlooked, so he said with a very red face: "It was Pranks, Mr. Holland; he fought for Snuff, and I guess they've made up now, so please don't let Thomas throw any more stones at him. That was why I put mud on your porch, but I won't do it again."

The old gentleman eyed him fiercely from under his bushy eyebrows. "Is that so?" he said. "Well, Thomas shall not throw any more stones, and perhaps we might agree to call it even; what do you say?"

"I think," remarked Miss Mallory as they went home, "that a little seed of kindness has been planted to-day, and all through Pranks, too. Suppose we try to keep it alive and help it grow."

"Do you mean we ought to be nice to Mr. Holland?" asked Susan.

"He is such a cross old man, Cousin Prue," said Mary.

"To be sure he does seem cross, but no doubt it is partly his rheumatism, so let's try being friendly," she replied.

The idea pleased Malcolm, who was a genial little soul, and that evening, without saying anything to anybody, he and Pranks went over to inquire for Snuff.

Mr. Holland saw them coming, and was just about to rap with his cane from force of habit, when he remembered the agreement.

"Pranks and I want to know how Snuff is," announced Malcolm.

"I guess he is doing pretty well; won't you sit down?"

Malcolm accepted the invitation, and crossing his knees entered into conversation in his most polite manner. He liked to talk, and before long he was telling about the T. C. Circle and the meetings under the sycamore tree, and what Cousin Prue had said about flowers and weeds, to all of which Mr. Holland listened as if he found it interesting.

"And what does T. C. stand for?" he asked, and Malcolm, forgetting it was a secret, told him.

"If you have any thinking caps to spare, I'd like to have one; mine seems to be wearing out," the old gentleman remarked.

Malcolm was gone so long Wyllis was sent to look for him, and was surprised to find him sitting in an armchair beside their former enemy, evidently on the best terms. So a neighborhood feud came to an end.

CHAPTER EIGHTH.

HOW THE THINKING CAPS HELPED.

THE summer days passed happily in Hill Top; the small savages who had formerly disturbed its peace were so busy about other matters they found little time for mischief.

Of course it is not to be supposed that they had at once settled down into models of propriety under the influence of their thinking caps, but the weekly meetings at the sycamore tree and the new sense of responsibility for neighborhood affairs were having a most wholesome effect. Occasionally, however, they slipped back into the old thoughtless ways.

One morning Mary Hyacinth and Susan were discovered giving Pranks a bath in the porcelain tub, and rubbing him with some of the best damask towels.

"They were on top, and I was in a hurry. I don't see what difference it makes, either; they will wash," was Mary's reply when Miss Mallory exclaimed at her.

"Then I suppose I may take your best embroidered handkerchief for a wash-rag if I choose," said her cousin.

"But that is different, Cousin Prue," cried Mary indignantly.

"It doesn't seem so very different to me. We are supposed to be taking care of things in your mother's absence, and do you honestly think she would like to have these pretty embroidered towels used on Pranks?" Cousin Prue sat on the edge of the tub and surveyed the culprits, who were very red in the face with their exertions.

"Mary brought them, so I just used them," said Susan easily.

"Because Mary didn't use her thinking cap were you excused from using yours?"

"It is such a bother to think," Mary exclaimed pettishly.

"Oh, very well then, perhaps I'd better put the caps away," Cousin Prue replied, leaving the room.

Before the next afternoon when the Circle met the girls had forgotten all about this.

"I can't find my cap anywhere," Mary Hyacinth exclaimed, kneeling beside the box in the hall where they were usually kept.

"Give me mine and Arthur's, and hurry; Cousin Prue and the kids have gone," said Wyllis.

"And please bring mine," called Susan from the porch.

The caps were each marked with the initials of the owner, so there was no difficulty in telling them apart; Mary handed out W, and A, and then bent over the box again.

"Susan, I don't see ours," she said.

"They must be there; do hurry."

"But they aren't; you can look for yourself."

There could be no doubt about it, the caps were not in the box, and Susan suggested that perhaps the boys had taken them for fun.

"If they have, it is just too mean," Mary exclaimed. "Let's go tell Cousin Prue."

Away they ran bareheaded down the sunny street and across the lot to the sycamore tree, where the others were already seated on the grass.

"Cousin Prue, we can't find our caps anywhere! Did you take them, Wyllis McLean? Because, if you did——" Mary paused, unable to think of a sufficiently strong threat.

"We'll turn you out of the Circle," said Susan.

"I never even saw your old caps," Wyllis cried indignantly.

"It isn't fair to accuse a person without any reason. He hadn't anything to do with it," said Cousin Prue composedly.

The girls looked at her in surprise as she continued: "I heard you say not long ago that thinking caps were too much bother, so I simply took you at your word and put them away."

"Why, Cousin Prue!" they both exclaimed, "we didn't really say that, did we?"

"Mary said it was too much bother to think, and Susan seemed to agree with her, and if that is the case the caps cease to mean anything."

The little girls looked so crestfallen that even the boys had not the heart to crow openly, though they nudged each other and smiled, and Miss Mallory hastened to add: "It was in one sense a very little thing; you were not unkind, and you did not destroy anything, but if you forget to think in small matters—or find it too much trouble—how are you going to remember in larger ones?"

"Never mind, Mary, I'll lend you mine. It has an M on it," said tender-hearted Malcolm in a loud whisper.

Cousin Prue laughed: "That will not be necessary, for if Mary and Susan have changed their minds, of course they may have their caps again."

These little caps had come to stand for too much that was pleasant to be lightly given up, so Mary said: "I didn't really mean it at all, Cousin Prue, and I'll try to think next time; won't you, Susan?"

"Yes, indeed; and another time I won't do things just because you say so, Mary," was her reply.

Then Miss Mallory produced the missing caps. "I was so sure you would think better of it that I brought them along," she said.

Next time it was the boys who fell into disgrace. Being very much interested in kite flying, in their cousin's absence one day, Wyllis and Arthur got out of a third story window on the back roof, in order, as they expressed it, to get a better start, and they were of course followed by the little boys. Here the alarmed and astonished Miss Mallory discovered them when she stepped off the car at the station.

This was so serious an offense that the older boys were not allowed to come to the next meeting of the Circle, and four caps were put away.

Wyllis and Arthur considered this very severe punishment, for Cousin Prue was telling them a delightful story, a chapter each time, all out of her own head, but they were too thoroughly convinced of her fairness to rebel. She made it clear that they were partly responsible for the younger children, and as they had led them into danger they deserved the greater punishment.

About this time the Thinking Caps found some special work to do. A severe storm swept over Hill Top one night, and the morning which dawned cool and clear showed trees and vines blown down, and serious washouts on the roads, and when the housekeepers undertook to order their marketing, it was found that the telephone wires were down.

Before noon news came to Hill Top of a sad accident that had occurred only half a mile away. Two little children, who lived in a cabin on the hillside, had started out early to pick blackberries, when the boy became entangled in one of the telephone wires, which had fallen across the wires of the electric railway, so that it was charged with the electric current. The child was severely shocked, and his sister, in her efforts to release him, had her hands

terribly burned. They had been seen by a motor-man on one of the cars, who hurried down to the power house and had the current turned off.

As soon as they heard of the accident Miss Janet and Miss Mallory went to inquire for the children and offer their assistance, and they were both touched by the sweet, patient face of little Annie.

When she returned Miss Mallory called the children together, told them about the bare cabin with its few comforts, and the busy mother who had no time to spare from her laundry work, and asked if the Thinking Caps could not suggest something to be done for the little invalid.

"Just now she is too ill to want to be amused, but the doctor thinks she will get well, though it will be a long time before she can use her poor brave little hands."

"Can't she use them a bit?" Susan asked, folding her arms tightly and trying to fancy how it would seem.

"Why, she couldn't play marbles, or croquet, or anything; could she?" said Oscar much impressed.

"I am afraid not," said Cousin Prue smiling.

"You could tell her stories; that would be the best thing. Perhaps she'd like the one about the

bear getting burned with the porridge," Malcolm suggested, making them all laugh.

"That is a baby story!" said Wyllis, adding: "Why can't we take her something to eat?"

"And flowers; sick people like them," put in Arthur sagely.

Mary was thinking earnestly. "I believe I'd like something pretty to look at that I could play with after I was well. Don't you think she would like to have a doll? I'll give her Alice."

Now this was generous of Mary, for Alice was a handsome doll with an extensive wardrobe.

"I doubt if anything would give her more pleasure. Alice could lie beside her and be company for her," replied Miss Mallory.

"And she may have some of my paper dolls," added Susan.

"Cousin Prue, if you would bind up our hands so we could see how it feels, maybe we could think better," Mary suggested.

So it happened that Professor Ellis coming up for a friendly call that afternoon was met by a puzzling sight. On the McLeans' lawn were six blue-capped individuals with their arms tightly bound to their breasts.

"What in the world! Have you all been in mischief, and is this the way Miss Mallory punishes you?" he exclaimed.

"No, indeed!" cried Mary indignantly. "We are trying to see how inconvenient it is to do without hands, so we can think how to amuse a little burnt girl."

When he had heard the story, the professor was very much interested.

"One of the most important lessons we can learn, is to put ourselves in another's place," he said, "and to be able to do it marks one fundamental difference between a civilized man and a savage."

When Annie was able to have visitors, Cousin Prue and one or two of the children went to see her almost daily. Mary and Susan took their dolls, and she never tired of seeing them dressed and undressed, and in the one Mary gave her for her very own, the little invalid's delight was unbounded.

Her visitors did not guess how much more interesting than any story book they themselves were to her. Their merry ways, and lively chatter, their dainty clothes—everything about them, in fact—charmed the little country girl.

Though she enjoyed the toys, and picture books,

and the nice things to eat sent by Miss Janet, it was a bright thought of Mary's that brought her the most lasting pleasure. The McLeans had a large automatic swing, and one day Mary proposed lending it to Annie.

"She could have pillows and be quite comfortable, and one of her brothers could sit in the other side and swing her," she said.

"It would be lovely for her, but I fear it is too large to be moved," her cousin replied.

Mary had thought it all out, however. "It comes apart, and I know the grocery man will take it in his wagon, and Charles can put it up," she said.

So it was done, and Annie, curled upon the broad seat with pillows about her, was happier than many a little girl who was able to use her hands.

"Cousin Prue," Mary said, "I never thought before how nice it is to have a room and *things*. Why there are only three rooms to Annie's whole house, and one of those is a shed!"

"I know a little girl who is using her thinking cap to some purpose these days," Cousin Prue answered with a smile.

CHAPTER NINTH.

THE BACHELOR.

It was as quiet as quiet could be in Hill Top one August morning, and Malcolm and Oscar playing marbles on the front walk were the only persons to be seen, when a man with a pack on his back came up the street from the direction of the Green lot.

Miss Mallory had been called away for a day or two by the illness of her aunt, who lived in town; Mary and Susan had gone with Miss Janet to see little Annie, and Professor Ellis had taken Wyllis and Arthur on an excursion up the river. This excursion had attracted a number of other people, among them the Gardners and old Mr. Holland and his wife, and, more than this, several houses were closed entirely, and their owners away on a summer trip.

"Here comes a *bachelor*," Malcolm remarked, glancing up as he searched in the grass for a missing marble.

Of course, he meant a peddler, but it was a habit of his to get the meaning of words rather twisted. Peddlers were not uncommon in Hill Top, where they carried on a brisk trade with the servants, who found it more convenient to buy small articles from them than to take the long ride to town.

"I wonder what he has got?" said Oscar, who had often watched the opening of a pack.

"Good-morning, little gentlemen! Are the folks at home?" the man asked, resting his load on the horse block.

"No; they're all away but Lucinda and me," was Malcolm's reply.

"Looks as if they might be away next door too," continued the peddler, glancing around him.

"That is where my uncle lives, and he has gone to Europe with my father and mother," Malcolm answered, always ready to give information.

"Well, I guess I'll go in and see Lucinda," and the peddler shouldered his pack again, and started toward the kitchen, followed by the boys.

Lucinda, however, was not in a good humor. "Don't want nothin'," she announced, standing on the back porch, and sweeping down cobwebs industriously. "That gingham of yours ain't no account;

I'se goin' to town to do my buyin' ;" then she marched into the kitchen, banging the screen door behind her. Clearly it was of no use to waste time here. Without a word the peddler walked away.

The children were disappointed.

"Lucinda, give us something to eat," Malcolm begged, going to the door.

"Go 'long, you ain't hungry," was the discouraging reply, but, nevertheless, she appeared a moment later with half a dozen cookies apiece.

"Now, you keep out of that peddler's way; I 'spicion him," she said.

The boys would have enjoyed following him around the neighborhood, but when they reached the front of the house, he was nowhere to be seen, so they carried their cookies to a favorite spot under some lilac bushes, that grew on the line between the Scotts' and the Gardners' grounds. Happening to look up, Oscar saw something that surprised him very much. It was the peddler's head that, for one instant, appeared in a side window in the second story of the Gardners' house. It was quickly withdrawn, but the child had recognized him.

"Malcolm," he whispered, "the peddler is up in

Mrs. Gardner's room; I saw him peek out of the window just now!"

"I wonder what he is doing there? They have all gone on the 'scursion," said Malcolm, adding with very big eyes, "Oscar, maybe he is a burglar!"

"Oh, Malcolm! maybe he'll kill us!"

"Don't you be afraid; I won't let him hurt you," Malcolm declared valiantly, "but let's run," and gathering up the remains of their cakes, away they scampered, and a moment later rushed in upon Lucinda in great excitement.

"My land!" she exclaimed, "didn't I tell you? 'Course he's a thief, and I reckon he's done killed poor Katie,—she's the only one at home. There ain't a man on the hill," she added despairingly, as she bolted the kitchen door.

"While I am gone, remember whatever happens to put on your thinking caps, and do the best you can," had been Cousin Prue's parting words to the Circle, and Malcolm didn't forget. If Cousin Prue were only here, she would know what to do, he was sure of that. She wouldn't let that bad man kill poor Katie. Even Miss Janet might help, or Mary, or Wyllis, but he and Oscar were such little boys, and Lucinda could do nothing but wring her hands.

Malcolm clasped his own tightly over his eyes, and thought and thought. Suddenly he cried joyously: "Lucinda, we can telephone to Mr. Gardner."

"I don't know nothin' bout telephoning," Lucinda declared.

The children were not allowed to touch the telephone except on special occasions, but Malcolm had once or twice talked to his father in the city, and had seen other persons do it so often he was sure he knew how.

"You just take the horn down, and hold it to your ear and say 'hello,' and they answer back," he explained.

"No, *they* say hello," corrected Oscar.

It was impossible for any of the three to find Mr. Gardner's number in the book, but Malcolm knew it was the big tobacco factory at the foot of the hill, so all he could do was to ask for that, standing on a chair with the receiver held tightly to his ear.

Fortunately they were not busy at the exchange just then, and Mr. Gardner was called up without much delay. He happened to be in the office, and answered the ring himself.

"Hello! what is it?" he asked.

"Mr. Gardner, is that you?" said a small voice.

"Yes; who is this?"

"I'm Malcolm; and there's a bachelor in your house, and we're afraid he's killed Katie, and everybody is away but Oscar and me. Please come as quick as you can."

Naturally Mr. Gardner was puzzled. He wondered if it could be some mischief of those McLean children; but the anxious tone of the little voice didn't sound like mischief.

"All right, Malcolm; I don't understand, but I'll come up," he answered, and calling to one of his clerks, they jumped on board a car that was starting up the hill.

Two excited little boys met the gentlemen half way between the station and the house, for Lucinda's alarm had so affected them, they had been afraid to leave the kitchen door till they saw the car stop and Mr. Gardner step off. Fortunately Charles, the McLeans' man, who had been sent to town on an errand, returned on the same car, so there were now three men to grapple with the bachelor, as Malcolm continued to call the peddler.

In the mean time this is what had happened in the Gardners' house. The only person there when the peddler arrived was Katie, an Irish girl, who

was at work in the kitchen. The man showed his wares, and laughed and joked with her, finally asking for something to eat, and when good-natured Katie stepped into the pantry, he quietly turned the key upon her. There she was held a prisoner with no chance of escape, for the only window was a small barred one. The peddler had then proceeded to ransack the house, replacing the worthless contents of his pack with everything of value he could carry away, opening locks with an ease that proved he was not new to the business. He had evidently counted upon a lengthy absence of the family and near neighbors, and if it had not been for that one glance from the window, when Oscar's quick eyes had seen him, he would, no doubt, have easily made his escape with a great many valuables. As it was, he was taken entirely unawares, and secured without any trouble.

Great was the excitement in Hill Top over this affair, and the little boys were the heroes of the hour. The other children looked upon them with admiration mixed with envy. Wyllis and Arthur felt that the burglar had taken an unfair advantage of their absence.

Malcolm's pride was a little hurt by the fun Mr.

Gardner made of his *bachelor*. It did not seem to him such a very bad mistake, "'Cause," as he explained to Cousin Prue, "a bachelor and a peddler are both *men*."

"Yes, dear, and for all we know the peddler may be a bachelor," she answered laughing. "So I wouldn't mind Mr. Gardner, for you were a dear, thoughtful boy, and I am proud of you."

That Mr. Gardner was not lacking in appreciation was shown by two beautiful toy boats with masts, and sails, and everything first-class boats should have, that came up from the city one day to the boys who had helped catch the burglar.

When Oscar had examined his thoroughly, he said: "Mother, don't you think a boy who could help catch a burglar is big enough *not* to wear curls?"

The next day he went to town with his father, and when he came back, he carried the curls in a box.

CHAPTER TENTH.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD OPINION AGAIN.

SUMMER days, particularly when they are full of happiness, have a trick of slipping by so swiftly that before you know it the trees are putting on their fall dress, and the flowers getting ready for their long nap. So it happened in Hill Top; the days grew shorter and cooler, but so gradually nobody thought about it, until there it was past the middle of September!

One pleasant afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Brent stood on their front porch talking to Miss Gardner. On the other side of the street was an open field, bright with goldenrod and asters, and crossing this there presently appeared a merry party, Miss Mallory with the six children dancing and fluttering about her like gay butterflies. They all wore their blue caps, for they had been holding a meeting of the T. C. Circle, and Mary and Susan had on red jackets over their white dresses, and with their hands full

of flowers and bright leaves, they added a pretty bit of color to the landscape.

"Just look!" said Mr. Brent. "What will they ever do without Prue?"

Miss Mallory saw them and crossed over.

"I was just thinking, Prudence, what a transformation you have brought about in three months," said Mrs. Brent, shaking hands.

"Yes; and after all those dreadful stories we told you, you were very brave, I must say," added Miss Gardner.

"You are mistaken," answered the young lady, sitting down on the step to arrange her flowers. "I have done nothing but play with them and make a few suggestions. You remember I refused to believe they were so naughty. All they needed was to learn to use their thinking caps."

"My baby is becoming positively strong minded," sighed Mrs. Brent, as Oscar came flying over the street with his cap on the back of his cropped head.

"It has been a delightful summer, and I'm sure real estate must have increased ten per cent. in value in Hill Top," continued Miss Gardner.

"The thinking caps have done some good work," said Mr. Brent. "How is the child who was

burned, Mary?" he asked as the others followed Oscar.

"She is ever so much better," was the answer. "We are going to see her now, when Cousin Prue is ready."

An hour later this same merry party met old Mr. Holland out for a walk, and no one who saw the pleasant greetings exchanged, could have believed how he used to pound with his cane and call, "Keep away from me" to these very children. The old gentleman joined Miss Mallory, saying:

"I'm very sorry to hear you are going away; we'll miss you."

"Thank you. Yes, the travellers are coming to-morrow, and I shall not be needed any longer, but I hope to come back often to see my friends in Hill Top," she replied.

Mrs. Morris, who was now well enough to be out in her garden, came down the walk to meet them, exclaiming: "What lovely goldenrod! and how bright you all look! When do you expect your mother, Mary?"

"They will be home to-morrow," replied the little girl. "We gathered these for you, Mrs. Morris," she added, handing her the flowers she carried.

"For me! How kind! I shall certainly tell your mother what dear thoughtful children you have been this summer, never once making a noise where I could hear it."

Miss Mallory stopped to talk to Mrs. Morris, but the children walked on. "Mary," whispered Susan, "don't you think it is nice to have people like you, and say things like that?"

"Yes, I believe I do," was Mary's reply.

Before they reached home they met Professor Ellis, who found it convenient in these days to make a great many visits to Hill Top; and then a little farther on was Mr. Gardner superintending the transplanting of some shrubs.

"Good evening!" the latter called. "Why, professor, is that you? Don't you know we don't allow bachelors around here any more?" he continued, coming out to shake hands, laughing at his own joke.

"It isn't my fault, only my misfortune," the professor answered, and Miss Mallory murmuring something about the air being chilly hurried on.

The next day the travellers arrived, and were received by five ecstatic children, who with Cousin Prue were waiting at the station. And what a de-

light to see Mrs. McLean so bright and well again, and quite able to walk up to the house without assistance, though any one seeing her with a hand on Wyllis's shoulder and her arm around Mary might have supposed she needed a good deal of support.

It was indeed a joy to have their fathers and mothers once more, but how could they give up Cousin Prue! The children seemed not to have realized she must go until she began to pack. In vain she reminded them that they would be too busy with lessons to miss her, and promised to come often to see them; they stood sorrowfully around her trunk, and refused to be comforted.

It was the professor who brought smiles to their faces again. He had come up to escort Miss Malory back to the city, and finding such mournful faces under the blue caps worn in honor of her departure, he told them a secret, which he first made them promise not to tell.

"Children, I have bought a lot in Hill Top; where do you suppose it is?"

"Where?" they asked.

"What do you say to the Green lot?"

"Have you really?" they cried.

"Yes; but that isn't all. I'm going to build a house there."

"But that will spoil it!" they cried.

"No, it will not, for the sycamore tree will then be in my front yard, and the T. C.s may meet there whenever they please; but that isn't the best of it." He paused with a mischievous smile, and Mary exclaimed, "Oh, do tell us!"

"Well, Miss Mallory has promised to live in the house after it is built."

"Has she? Have you, Cousin Prue?" they cried, as the young lady appeared. "Have you promised to live in the professor's house?"

Miss Mallory laughed and looked a little embarrassed, but acknowledged she had.

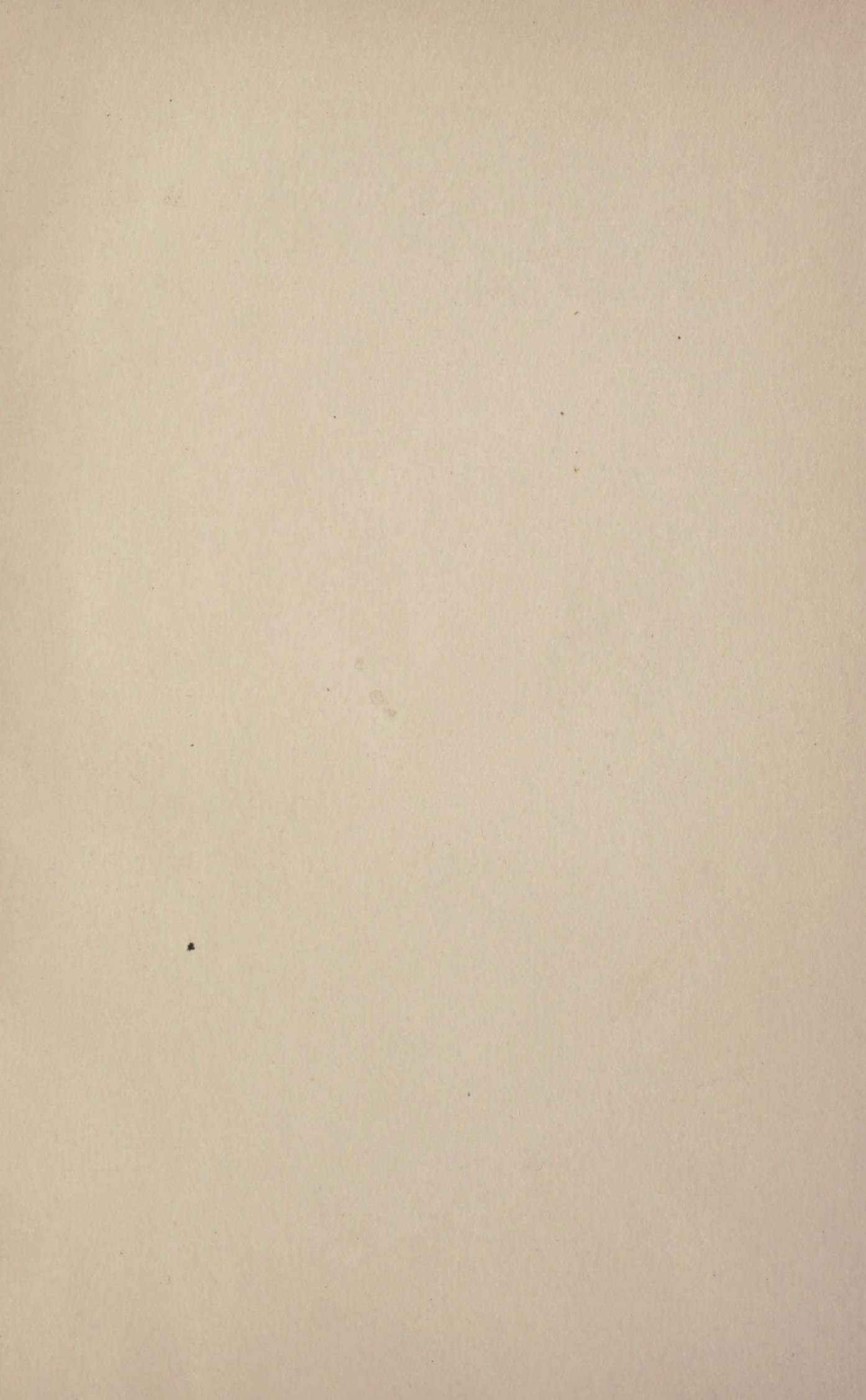
This put a new face on things, for if Cousin Prue were really coming back to them again, they could stand saying good-by for a while. So after all it was a cheerful party which accompanied her to the car.

"You are dear children," she said, kissing them all around. "I have had a delightful summer with you, and now, good-by, and don't forget our motto."

Amid a great waving, and shouting, and kissing

of hands the car moved off. Cousin Prue and the professor stood on the back platform, and as they went around the curve, the last thing they saw was half a dozen thinking caps bobbing up and down by the roadside.

THE END.



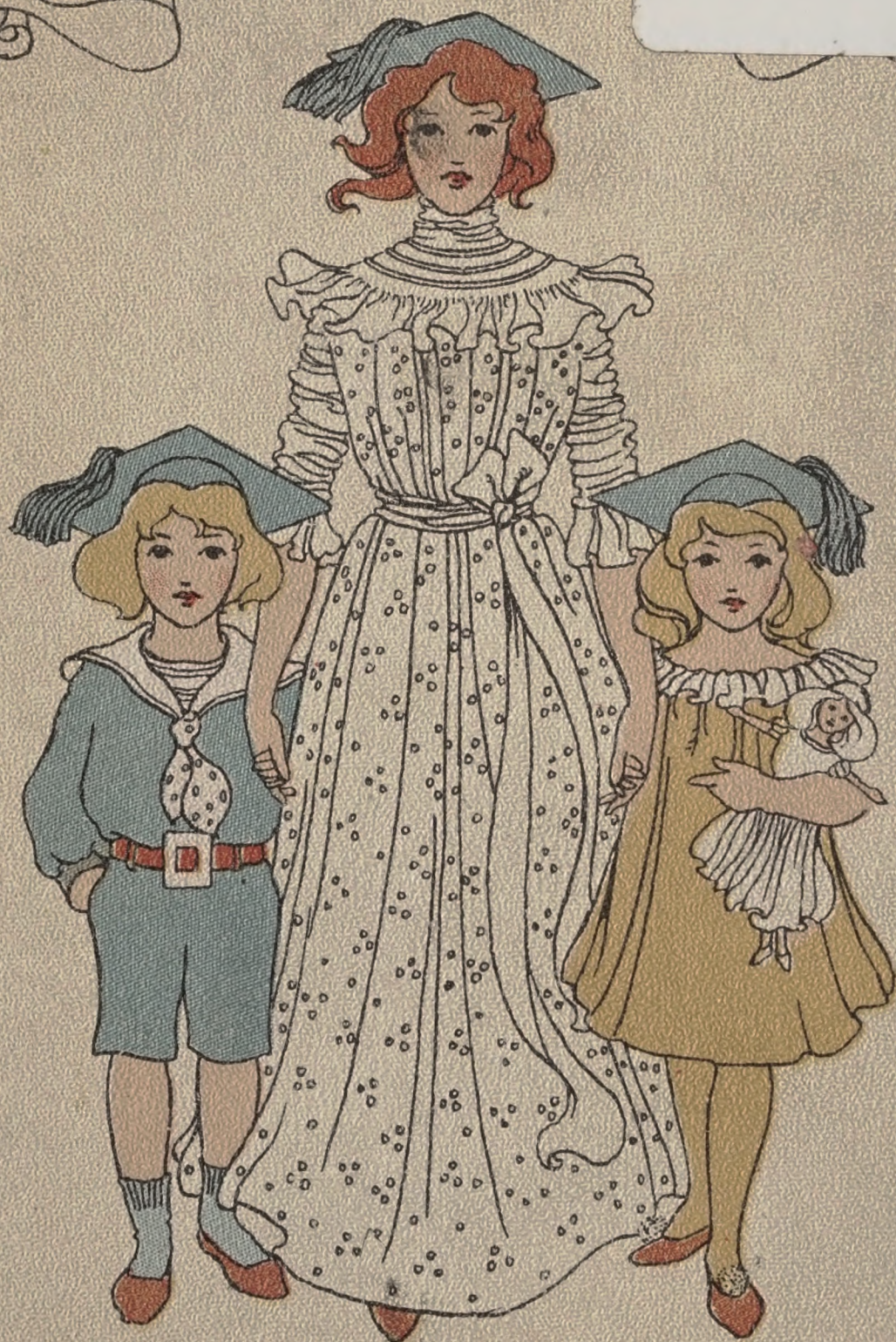
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